

★ news release

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BANTAM HENS ATTEMPTING TO HATCH WHOOPERS

It is not known if the two eggs at Lafayette are fertile. The eggs are olive grey with brown splotches, and because of thickness and heavy pigmentation, light cannot be made to penetrate the shells for detection of embryos.

The Fish and Wildlife Service said odds in favor of the eggs hatching are not great, but because of the extreme rarity of the species, it believes the attempt should be made to bolster the whooping crane population.

Only 39 of the cranes are known to exist, and an all-out conservation battle is being waged to prevent the tallest of American water birds from becoming extinct.

There are 32 wild whooping cranes. They winter at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas and have started their annual return to their breeding grounds in Canada.

All seven whooping cranes in captivity are in Douglass's care at the Audubon Park Zoo. One of them is Rosie, recently transferred from San Antonio Zoo for mating with one of the New Orleans birds.

The two eggs at Lafayette were laid by Josephine, the mother of four whooping cranes reared by Douglass. Josephine's mate is Crip.

The eggs may be taken from the Bantams a few hours before hatching and placed in an incubator to protect the chicks from injury and disease.

Fish and Wildlife authorities say that if the eggs hatch and the Bantams see the results of their work, they can be pardoned for a little motherly pride. The whooping crane reaches a height of five feet and a weight of about 15 pounds.

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Note to Editors: Photographs cannot be taken of the Bantams, Patience and Petulance, until their setting is completed. The hens are being kept in subdued light, and their nesting boxes are within wire cages. Any disturbance, such as a flash bulb, could ruin the hatching attempt.